



## Death as a Fateful Moment? The Reflexive Individual and Scottish Funeral Practices

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### Abstract

Death is considered by some commentators to be problematic for the inhabitants of a late modern era, so that when individuals are confronted by death they revert to using traditional institutions and practices. This paper draws on sociological research exploring Scottish funeral practices to consider whether this is the case, or whether individuals are able to employ a process of self-reflexivity even when they are planning the funeral of someone about whom they cared. Two funerals are described in the article, and the suggestion is made that their organisers behaved some of the time as reflexive individuals as well as also making use of the traditional authorities of modernity, such as the family and church.

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**Keywords:** *Abstract Systems; Death; Fateful Moments; Reflexive Individual; Scottish Funeral Practices; Self-Reflexivity; Traditional Institutions*

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### Introduction

**1.1** Death and its relevance to individual humans is often described in problematic terms, despite its being an inevitable fact of life. Berger (1967), for example, describes death as representing a marginal situation, in which the death of one individual has the capacity to reinforce others' awareness of their own mortality and so threaten their sense of safety and security in the world. Societies must therefore develop techniques and rituals which enable the business of life to continue in the face of the awesome threat that death presents (Berger 1967). For Giddens (1991) death appears as a fateful moment, such as occurs when '...an individual stands, as it were, at a crossroads in their existence; or where a person learns of information with fateful consequences' (Giddens, 1991: 113). For example, when an individual receives a diagnosis of terminal illness he or she may be offered options for treatment, but the patient will know that the ultimate outcome is going to be his or her own death. Reflexivity alone cannot equip individuals to deal with such a moment effectively, for the shock generated by facing the death of someone about whom an individual cares robs that individual of the ability to think and reflect clearly, at least on a temporary basis. Confrontation with such a fateful moment can therefore propel the reflexive individual of late modernity out of reflexivity and into the traditional modes of thinking of the past, for where else can assistance be found (Giddens 1991)?

**1.2** Walter (1994) suggests that in a location and a time where individuals engage in reflexive decision making about their lives it is also possible for them to do so about their deaths. In such a locale the authority for decision making would rest with the person who is dying and he or she could decide such matters as where the death should occur, who should be present and even, perhaps, when it should take place.<sup>[1]</sup> Such reflexive decision making may also continue after death, with a funeral that represents the wishes, beliefs and ideas of the individual who has died and involves planning by, and the participation of, the bereaved family and friends (Walter 1994).

**1.3** Walter (1994) describes this process as a revival of death. In Walter's terms a late modern response to death relies on psychological expertise and an understanding of the stages that individuals must go through when they are dying or grieving. When this is combined with a post modern response to death, which focuses on the individual as the site of authority, the result is a neo-modern approach to death (Walter, 1994: 47). This is of particular interest, because the neo-modern revival of death means that when

the individual is prioritised as the expert in a particular situation, that individual can make choices from a vast range of options, including those that may be characterised as traditional or modern. Thus an individual may die in a hospital cared for by the medical experts of modernity and this may be followed by a traditional burial with a funeral conducted by a representative of a traditional Christian church with a neo-modern focus on talking about the person who died. Social and cultural practices for handling death are not free floating any more than are the decisions that individuals within a given social setting make (Walter, 1994).

**1.4** This paper explores the issue of whether early twenty-first century Scotland offers a location and time where the reflexive individual is made manifest in the organisation and conduct of funerals. Beginning with a discussion of relevant aspects of reflexive individuality the paper then moves on to describe the research on which it is based. The article considers two specific funerals organised by widowers for their deceased wives. One of these funerals took place on the Isle of Lewis, the other in Edinburgh, and both are described in comparison with the usual funeral format for each location. Consideration is given to the degree of reflexivity exhibited by each widower and the paper concludes with a discussion of the issues raised.

## **The reflexive individual**

**2.1** The reflexive individual is a person who must take full responsibility for the creation and maintenance of his or her own identity. This means that the individual must constantly reflect upon his or her life and make decisions about what kind of a person to be, what work to do, where to live and with whom, as well as what goals to aim for and how to achieve them (Giddens 1991). The notion of individuals thinking about their lives and making decisions based upon their own reflexive processes is neither new nor unique to inhabitants of late modernity. However, the degree to which such reflection is necessary in a late modern era and the way in which all the inhabitants of such a social setting must engage in the reflexive process is new (Mouzelis 1999). In times of modernity individuals had the authority of institutions such as the Church, the state or the family to draw upon and these provided a baseline from which the individual went into the world. Despite having the capacity to reflect upon their lives, individuals knew who they were because, for example, they were born into a family in a particular area of the country, they went to school and later worked in the same locality, and they attended services held by the national church on a Sunday. Individuals, particularly those with limited resources, had little opportunity to change their life situations even if they desired to, but late modernity lays different claims upon individuals. In a late modern era individuals have no option but to make decisions about their life situations and make changes to their lives on the basis of those decisions. Choices must be made without the assistance of outside authorities, because the traditional authorities are no longer as relevant, and individuals are increasingly forced back upon their own resources, except at times of dire need (Giddens 1991).

**2.2** The institutions of modernity, however, do continue to exist and for some individuals they continue to be important. The Church of Scotland is the national church in Scotland and, although its membership has fallen in recent years (Brown 2001) it currently claims to have 500,000 members and 1,200 ministers (The Church of Scotland 2011). The relationship that church members have with the institutional church may have changed over time, but the traditional institution itself survives (Davie 1994). Institutions such as the Church of Scotland are still of key importance when an individual is confronted by death (Giddens 1991), but it is not immediately apparent how traditional institutions work alongside the institutions of late modernity (Taylor-Gooby 2005). What is clear, however, is that in a period of late modernity the continued operation of traditional institutions relies upon the reflexivity of individuals who make the decision to engage with traditional authorities. For example, a minister may be a representative of the traditional institution of the church, or he or she may, on occasion, be the representative of an expert system typical of a late modern era, but he or she has always made the reflexive choice to submit to the traditional authority of the church.

**2.3** For an individual to navigate effectively through a late modern world he or she must employ a form of self-reflexivity, which is an '...autonomous monitoring of life narratives...' (Lash 1994: 116). By monitoring their own life choices and the possible consequences of those choices, an individual is enabled not only to create his or her own identity but also, in the event that the decisions made lead to disappointing results, to recreate the identity. It might seem that a constantly shifting identity could lead to an individual feeling a sense of confusion as to whom he or she is, but this is prevented by the composition and narration of a coherent autobiography to go with the identity (Giddens 1991). An individual's life story, however, must maintain a close link with reality, so that the individual avoids becoming a Walter Mitty style character, whose preferred life is lived in the privacy of the imagination (Thurber 1945). The individual's story must also incorporate into itself events that take place within the wider social sphere (Giddens 1991). For example, an individual who fails to acknowledge the death of a close relative and continues to speak and behave as if the relative were still alive, might be considered as having problems with grief, particularly in a social setting that prioritises a medicalised view of appropriate grief and mourning (Walter, 1999).

**2.4** The concept of the reflexive individual is not, however, without its difficulties. Such an individual must make decisions for him or herself about matters that were once decided by tradition (Mouzelis 1999). The reflexive individual described by Giddens (1991) has two possible routes to follow, so that he or she can either make a rational decision in any given situation or can respond with a kind of unthinking compulsion. This view of the individual has been criticised as presenting an overly rational picture, for there may be other '...less cognitive ways of navigating reflexively in a world full of choices and individual challenges' (Mouzelis 1999: 85). Research into aspects of family life, for example, suggests that while reflexivity is evident in relationships and the decisions made about them, there is also evidence that the institution of the family, and the conventional behaviours associated with that institution, continue to exert an influence. Gilding (2010) suggests that primogeniture continues to influence the decisions made with regard to the future running of family businesses, and also that spouse and children continue to inherit as primary

beneficiaries after death. Deciding to bequeath one's worldly goods to surviving spouse and children may be evidence of neither rational reflexivity nor unthinking compulsion, but an honouring of conventional expectations and customs, or evidence of affection and concern (Mouzelis 1999).

**2.5** The choices that any individual can make are always constrained by factors outside his or her own control. Individuals learn from others such skills as how to speak the language, how to behave in a social setting, how to understand the nuances of social life and the expectations placed upon him or her. These are all essential skills for the exercise of self-reflexivity, so that the existence of the reflexive individual is dependent upon the particular social setting (Adams 2003). It is also the case that issues of inequality existing within a society are likely either to open up or limit the opportunities available to the individual, depending upon his or her placing within that society. People with wealth, for example, have access to a wider range of options than those who are poor because they have access to the resources with which to pay for their choices (Giddens 1991).

**2.6** Even in a late modern era individuals are not entirely free floating, for their decisions are filtered through the abstract systems of symbolic tokens and expert systems (Giddens 1990). Symbolic tokens, notably money in either cash or credit form, allow wealthier people a wide range of options to choose from, while lack of money denies poorer individuals many of those same choices. In terms of arranging a funeral, lack of money and worry about how to pay for the funeral can act as a restraint when making choices for some individuals, while others may choose to put themselves into debt to avoid constraining their options (Drakeford 1998; Corden et al. 2008). The funeral options available will usually be described and offered to bereaved families by representatives of the expert system, who will make judgements as to what the bereaved family can afford or are prepared to pay.

**2.7** Expert systems utilise technical knowledge that is valid regardless of the individuals who use them (Giddens 1991). Such expert systems are pervasive in late modern times and are to be found in almost all aspects of life and death. Funeral directors, funeral officiants of all kinds, crematorium and cemetery staff, florists, coffin makers; these are all representatives of the expert systems without which the bereaved family cannot manage. The intervention of the expert systems is necessary because individuals have been pulled away from belief in the traditional authorities which once guided people's lives; whereas once, for example, Scots turned to the Church when someone died (Smith 2009) this is no longer automatic for many people in Scotland. Expert systems have also become necessary because, with the increased specialisation of contemporary life, individuals lack the skills and knowledge needed to carry out many tasks deemed essential (Giddens 1991). This is of particular relevance in dealing with a death, for individuals and families rarely have the skills and technical knowledge to care for a dead body and are unlikely to know how to organise a funeral without the input of professionals, even if they should wish to do so. Death and dying have become the province of the experts (Howarth 2007).

**2.8** Abstract systems act as disembedding mechanisms, lifting social relations out of the local context and realigning them over potentially vast distances (Giddens 1990). With the growth of electronic media and the increased mobility of individuals, it is possible to purchase goods and services from an individual one will never meet using money one will never see; individuals may have relationships of many kinds with others whom they never meet face to face. This applies to dealing with the aftermath of a death, just as it applies to other life situations and it can be difficult for an individual to discriminate between the many forms of mediated experience available. There are, for example, internet sites available that act as a resource for people planning funerals (My Last Song 2010), as well as sites for creating memorials (Gone Too Soon nd) and for sharing experiences of bereavement with others (Bereavement UK 2010). There is also a vast range of published literature offering individuals assistance with funeral planning (for example Johnstone-Burt et al. 2005; Morrell and Smith 2006), as well as organisations prepared to offer advice and information (Wienrich and Speyer 2003: 364-378). One of the problems therefore for individuals living in this kind of social environment is the difficulty of knowing whose advice to take, or which representative of the expert systems to trust (Giddens 1990). In the case of organising a funeral, individuals often employ the funeral director with whom they first make contact, without shopping around for a better deal or for a practitioner who might provide a service better suited to their requirements (Parsons 2003).

**2.9** The above discussion of aspects of the reflexive individual has highlighted a person who must make choices about his or her life, but in circumstances where there are constraints upon the options available and further constraints upon the decisions that can realistically be made. Such an individual is not free floating, but subject to the influences of the social setting in which he or she lives, and must make use of symbolic tokens and expert systems when navigating a path through life. Thus an individual may engage in self-reflexivity and utilise abstract systems as an aid to decision making processes. For the recently bereaved individual who has the responsibility of organising a funeral for the deceased person this presents particular challenges, as revealed by the research which will be described next.

## **The research project**

**3.1** The research upon which this article draws was an exploratory study of Scottish funeral practices. It was a qualitative project designed to investigate both the kinds of funeral practices that were being used in early twenty-first century Scotland and also to explore whether those practices showed evidence of personalisation, as increasingly appears to be the case in the western world. In this context personalisation refers to the process by which a funeral is organised so that it references the character and personality of the deceased individual, often through the use of eulogies, music and readings (Emke 2002; Garcés-Foley & Holcomb 2006; Schäfer 2007). Within this setting, the speaking of the eulogy and talk amongst mourners about the deceased person, which often takes place during a social gathering after the funeral, has been described as part of the process of writing the final chapters of the biography of the person who died. Such talk is notable because it allows the opportunity for varied stories to be told about the deceased individual, highlighting the fact that an individual is perceived differently by different people, and it also offers a means

of incorporating the death into the on-going lives of mourners (Walter 1996; Arnason 2000).

**3.2** The research was conducted in three sites from a desire to discover practices in locations which differed in terms of their histories and social compositions. The locales selected were Edinburgh, Scotland's capital city; Inverness, the capital of the Highlands; and Stornoway, the main town on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. The predominant method of data gathering was the use of unstructured interviews. These were conducted with a range of professionals who deal with funerals in the course of their employment, including ministers and elders from churches, non-religious funeral celebrants, crematorium and cemetery managers, funeral directors and one gravedigger. In total 56 professionals were interviewed. Ten interviews were also carried out with bereaved people who had arranged a funeral after the death of someone to whom they were close. Professionals were approached directly with the request for an interview, but for reasons of ethics and the sensitivity of the topic, bereaved individuals were contacted either through a professional gatekeeper or by advertising in the local press and waiting for bereaved individuals to make contact with the researcher (Lee 1993). In addition to interviews, a small number of funerals were attended as a participant observer. Scottish funerals tend to be public occasions, so the researcher dressed in similar fashion to other mourners and took part in the minimal activity required of such a role. This included, for example, standing and sitting at appropriate moments or joining in the singing of hymns. A number of written materials such as In Memoriam notices in the local papers and orders of funeral service were also reviewed.

**3.3** Interviews were recorded, with the permission of the interviewee, and recordings were transcribed. In total there were 81 hours of interviews with professionals, with interviews ranging from three quarters of an hour to just under three hours. Interviews with bereaved individuals varied from one hour to two and a half hours, and in total 18 hours of interviews were recorded with bereaved people. The relationships of bereaved to deceased individual represented by informants were: three widows, three widowers, two daughters, one niece and one friend. The software package Atlas.ti was used as an aid to data management, and analysis was carried out using a process of basic coding followed by analytic coding (Richards 2005).

**3.4** The data used in the following sections to describe and discuss specific funerals come from two interviews with widowed men, one from Stornoway and one from Edinburgh. These two funerals were selected because they illustrate different aspects of reflexivity at work. They show that reflexive practices can be found in locales where traditional practice is regarded as the norm, and that tradition can be called upon in late modern locations where it might be unexpected. The names used for individuals are pseudonyms.

## **Stornoway funerals**

**4.1** Funerals in Stornoway follow a format that people living locally describe as traditional. The funeral director said, 'I think my grandfather would recognise the funerals here if he came back today', emphasising a view of funerals as traditional. Despite this, however, there have been changes in practice. Until the 1980s funerals commonly took place in the family home, with the body of the deceased person staying at home in the interval between death and funeral. The period between a death and a funeral was, and still is, usually only three days and historically there was a service of religious worship that took place in the home on each of the evenings between death and burial.

**4.2** Today, most Stornoway funerals take place in the church rather than in the family home, and the deceased individual spends the time between death and the funeral in an anteroom at the church. The night before the funeral there will be a service in the church, termed a wake, and this is composed of prayer, Bible readings and the singing of a psalm or hymn. The usual time for a Stornoway funeral is 1.30pm and during the service the coffin remains in the anteroom. A Free Church of Scotland minister said, 'a funeral is very simple. You have a singing, a prayer, you have readings, you have another prayer, another singing, you have a short word from the Bible...and the benediction'. The singing referred to here is exclusively of psalms, and in many Isle of Lewis churches this singing will be unaccompanied by musical instruments. The Free Church of Scotland minister also commented that 'your focal point is not actually the person who has died, your focal point is God', while a colleague from the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) remarked that 'there is no eulogy, no narrative about the deceased person...that would be frowned upon'.

**4.3** Bible readings and prayers are lead by elders and ministers, who are all male. At the end of the service of worship, mourners leave the church with the men in the lead. Outside male mourners carry the coffin, which the funeral director has placed ready, along the street in the direction of the cemetery to which they are going. The procession is conducted in such a way that all men who wish to take a turn at carrying the coffin can do so, and it is expected that the women will watch from the doors of the church.<sup>[2]</sup> Once everyone has had his turn at carrying the coffin it is loaded into the hearse for the journey to the cemetery, where the minister speaks briefly and invited family and friends lower the coffin into the grave. It is not unusual for mourners to fill the grave and replace the turf before leaving the cemetery.

**4.4** Women do not have an active role in this process, but today 'sometimes you'll get the family wanting the ladies to be in the procession' (funeral director), although they do not carry the coffin. It is also the case that 'more and more women are coming to the burial itself' (Free Church of Scotland minister), but not all ministers encourage that; 'women who have not previously been to a graveyard, it tends to become a gossip house, it tends to become very irreverent' (hospital chaplain). The historical role of women in Stornoway as carers of the dying and the dead has been usurped by the hospital and the funeral director, making their role currently ambiguous. It is perhaps the case that a process of self-reflexivity has started a period of change as women seek new ways of involving themselves when someone dies.

**4.5** Burial is the only method of disposal available on the island, although the funeral director arranges for approximately eight to twelve bodies a year to be taken to the mainland for cremation. This involves a two and three quarter hour ferry trip, followed by a 60 mile road journey to the nearest crematorium in Inverness. If family from the island attend the crematorium then they also, of course, face the return journey.

**4.6** This brief word portrait is intended to give a view of funerals which, while changed from those of the past, still owe much to traditional island practices. Funerals in Stornoway are not personalised to the deceased individual in ways discussed above, but on occasion a funeral will take place on the Isle of Lewis which differs radically from the norm and which can be described as personalised. The following funeral is one such.

### **The reflexive Lewis funeral**

**5.1** Lucy and Robert knew that Lucy was going to die almost a year before she did so; the hospital consultant had given her three to six months to live, but 'she went seven months beyond the period they said' (Robert). Neither of the couple were born on the Isle of Lewis, but they had spent family holidays there and Lucy 'fell in love with the place and wanted to come here out of the city. About 15 years ago we decided we would buy a place and actually live here properly' Robert said. Lucy was a Christian woman with a faith in God, but, said Robert, she 'was a private person when it came to religion...she didn't go along with the Free Church system of spreading the gospel here because it's very indoctrinated'. While she was dying, Lucy told her husband that she did not want to be buried in a Free Church cemetery using local burial customs, but that she would prefer to be cremated. After Lucy's death Robert discussed her wishes with his adult daughter, who supported him in the decision to explore the possibility of a cremation.

**5.2** Once Lucy had died the funeral director made all the arrangements. He prepared her body and placed her in the coffin which he then took to the ferry. On the mainland one of the Inverness funeral directors collected Lucy from the ferry and took her to the crematorium where 'there was a little service...we didn't actually attend...it was a lot of expense and we had things to do here anyway' Robert said. Some of Lucy's friends from the mainland did attend and the service was taken by a hospital chaplain she had met whilst she had been in hospital in Inverness. Robert continued, 'and then she came back a few days later, and the ashes were delivered here you know and...we'd arranged the service which in fact took place a fortnight later'. The funeral ceremony was planned between Robert and his daughter and it was held in the family's garden where 'we mentioned Lucy, we mentioned what she'd done, the sort of life she lived, how she passed on...we sprinkled the ashes on the rockery,' Robert said. There was no recorded music, but Robert said that 'a Church of Scotland man (who) visited Lucy when she was ill at home here and in hospital...sang a couple of hymns and he's a lovely voice'.

**5.3** Robert himself gave a eulogy to Lucy, which he described as a celebration of her life. He spoke about their 'long road' together in marriage and how 'from time to time we hit the odd pothole', but his main focus was on the character and personality of his wife and, in particular, the courage with which she faced her last months, knowing that she was dying.

**5.4** Despite the unusual nature of the funeral ceremony many locals came to pay their respects to a popular woman, and 'most people thought that was quite strange...but at the end of the day I think they valued our views and respected it' said Robert. At the end of the service everyone went into the house where they had 'cups of tea and coffee and sandwiches, that sort of thing, and drifted away at their own pace. But there were nearly a hundred people here, which considering we were incomers was a good recommendation of Lucy's popularity'.

**5.5** Robert and Lucy had moved to the Isle of Lewis 15 years before her death. They were thus living far away from their relatives, so that 'very few of the family members made it up here (for the funeral) because of the distance and the cost' Robert said. They had both integrated into life on the island to such an extent that Lucy's funeral was well attended, but they lacked an emotional link with the island's traditions, so that Lucy saw local funeral practices from the perspective of someone who was used to a less impersonal style of funeral. Robert said that for himself he would be happy for a traditional Lewis funeral: 'the local system doesn't bother me and I'll be quite happy to follow it myself'.

**5.6** While it is easy to conclude that Lucy's garden funeral was personalised to her (Emke 2002; Garces-Foley & Holcomb 2006; Schäfer 2007), it may also be helpful to consider whether the concept of the reflexive individual can help clarify the processes by which this funeral came about. As non-natives living on the island it was perhaps inevitable that Lucy and Robert should engage in a process of reflexivity. The Lewis way of conducting funerals was alien to them and they, especially Robert after Lucy had died, had to make a choice. One advantage of using traditional practices, that one does not need to make decisions at a time when one is grieving, was not available to Lucy and Robert. Robert and Lucy discussed her funeral arrangements, although she left the final decisions to him. After she died Robert, after consulting his daughter, decided to honour his wife's wishes and send her body for cremation, despite the extra expense involved and the possibility of offending the people amongst whom he has continued to live as a widower.

**5.7** In order to do this he made use of the expert systems available to him and for which he had sufficient financial resources to pay. After Lucy died, Robert spoke to the funeral director about the family's options, 'we got hold of the funeral director and asked him, you know, what the procedure was'. The local funeral director co-ordinated the process, and the expert systems needed to carry out the cremation were two firms of funeral directors, a ferry company, the crematorium and its staff and a mainland hospital chaplain who delivered a service when the cremation took place. Lucy's ashes were returned to the island using the postal system.

**5.8** The decisions that Robert made with regard to the cremation were thus filtered through expert systems. It was necessary for Robert to trust individuals he did not know and will never meet, and this is particularly the case with the funeral director and crematorium staff from Inverness; he needed to believe that they would carry out their designated tasks efficiently and return Lucy's ashes to him safely (Giddens 1990). Without the input of the local funeral director who made all the arrangements it might have been possible for Robert to convey Lucy's body to the mainland, but it would have been extremely difficult. While Robert was keen to adhere to his wife's wishes it is doubtful that he would have made such a choice without the experts in place to make such a decision seem reasonable and practicable. As Robert said during interview, the family did not attend Lucy's cremation service partly because of the expense involved in travelling to Inverness, and also because 'we had things to do here anyway'. If Robert and his daughter had needed to undertake the physical tasks involved in conveying Lucy's body to the crematorium themselves, they would not have been able simultaneously to do the things that they needed to do on the island.

**5.9** The funeral ceremony was planned for the garden because Lucy was a keen gardener and because the family wished to scatter her ashes there. When Robert spoke her eulogy he gave the mourners present his own perspective on his wife's life, of the important aspects of her character and the final days of that life. He also spoke in an apparently open and honest way about their relationship. In order for Robert to do this it was necessary for him to engage in a process of self-reflexivity in relation to his role as a husband and his relationship with his now deceased wife. In addition to this he was also engaging in the process of writing the final chapter of Lucy's life (Walter 1996; Arnason 2000), while simultaneously writing her death into his autobiography. This meant that he was bringing the external event of Lucy's death into his on-going life story as a reflexive individual must in order to maintain contact with reality (Giddens 1991).

**5.10** The concept of the reflexive individual who engages in self-reflexivity and uses abstract systems to help in the process of making decisions and then carrying them out is helpful in unpacking how Robert went about the task of arranging his wife's funeral. His actions stand out because they were alien to the social setting in which he lived, but the following funeral was arranged in a location where tradition was considered by research informants to be much less important than the idea that a funeral should be personal.

### **Edinburgh funerals**

**6.1** Most Edinburgh families employ the services of a funeral director to make the arrangements on their behalf, and he or she will collect the body of the deceased from the place of death, prepare it for the coffin and then accommodate it until the time of the funeral. Funerals in Edinburgh are predominantly cremations; the manager of the local authority crematorium, who is also responsible for the provision and maintenance of burial space within the city, said that 'probably 85 per cent are cremations, certainly it must be in the 80s go for cremations as opposed to earth burial'. He also remarked that while some families choose to hold a funeral service in another location and then come to the crematorium solely for the purpose of the committal and cremation, for '...the majority of them (funerals) the whole service is held here'. All three of Edinburgh's crematoria have a catafalque on which the coffin is placed when it is brought into the chapel. Once in place the coffin is covered with a pall cloth so that it cannot be seen by mourners, and at the time of the committal the coffin is invisibly lowered into the crematory below, where the actual cremation will take place.

**6.2** Those organising funerals in Edinburgh have access to ministers, priests and elders from a variety of different faiths, as well as the established Church of Scotland and a number of humanist celebrants who will lead a non-religious funeral. Music plays an important part in many city funerals, and 'for 19 funerals out of 20 it would be bracketed by music beginning and end' (hospice chaplain). Music will also be played during the funeral service, and usually this will be pre-recorded, but 'we have jazz bands coming in ...guitarists, keyboard players, pipers of course' (crematorium superintendent). A eulogy to the deceased individual is a common component of a funeral, and whoever is conducting the funeral will liaise with the bereaved family to gather sufficient information to compose a eulogy. As one Church of Scotland minister expressed it, 'I make an arrangement to see the next of kin...the main part of that visit is usually taking them through the whole story of the deceased'.

**6.3** Funerals which are conducted by a Christian minister will typically include prayers, hymns and Bible readings, although often an ordained minister will conduct a service that has little religious content for, as a Church of Scotland minister said, 'I'm responsible not only for funerals for the people in my congregation, but also for the funerals of people in the parish, who may have no church connection at all'. Secular ceremonies are likely to include poems and readings from philosophers, with the eulogy to the deceased person as the focus of the ceremony. It is not unusual in Edinburgh to find that family members or friends wish to take an active role: 'there began to creep in about the mid 90s...I don't know, the beginnings of a sort of expressed wish to participate...a lot of families now want some sort of participation' (Church of Scotland minister).

**6.4** Flowers are a frequent feature at funerals, and these can be standard wreaths or something more imaginative, as one funeral director described, 'we've had some boats, teddy bears...flowers in the shape of a Guinness...we get the old ones with the letters spelling names'. At larger funerals there will often be an attendance card for mourners to complete, telling how they knew the deceased individual and a social gathering for lunch or tea is an almost invariable practice. As this brief description indicates, there are commonalities between Edinburgh funerals, but there is nothing that research informants described as coming from a distinctive Edinburgh tradition. The crematorium manager said that 'burial's the traditional way of disposing of a dead body', implying that Edinburgh funerals do not follow traditional routes. The following funeral includes some aspects of common practice, in addition to an example of the widower acting as a reflexive individual.

## The not so reflexive Edinburgh funeral

**7.1** As with the Isle of Lewis funeral, this was one arranged by a widower after the death of his wife, although in this case the death was unexpected. Janet was taken ill on a Monday and she died two days later in hospital with Graham at her side. Janet was an Edinburgh native whose family had lived in the city for generations, while Graham had moved to the city during the 1960s. Graham and Janet had two adult children, a son and a daughter. While their son Jeremy lived locally and helped his father plan the funeral, their daughter Caroline lived in the United States and she had to fly home to Scotland for the funeral. Janet's funeral was a cremation, 'she had always said she wanted a cremation, and certainly both her mother and her father were cremated', said Graham. However, unlike most Edinburgh cremations Graham decided that they should go to the crematorium first and then hold what he called 'a service of thanksgiving' in church afterwards. Of this decision Graham said:

It's always seemed to me the tidiest way of doing it, if that makes sense. I've been to others where you've got the service and then...if you don't want to go to the crematorium, then you're hanging around...whereas this went boom, boom, boom, really from the crematorium to the church to the hotel. It just seemed such a tidy way to do it.

**7.2** After Janet's death Graham informed the family solicitor, before contacting a funeral director recommended by a friend. This friend was a florist and he did the flowers for Janet's funeral 'and they were beautiful', and the funeral director was also 'very good...and took care of everything', said Graham. The most difficult decision he had to make was to decide who should conduct the funeral. Both Janet and Graham were Christians and attended church, but Janet had fallen out with their local minister and at the time of her death she was seeking a new congregation to attend on a regular basis. Graham took the time, therefore, to shop around to find a minister of whom he thought Janet would have approved and he ultimately asked a lay, or unordained, preacher to take both the funeral service at the crematorium and the service of thanksgiving in a non-conformist church.

**7.3** The funeral service was for 'family and invited friends...what I put in the notice was private family cremation', Graham said. During this service there were 'a couple of hymns, reading from the Bible and then the actual committal'. The lay preacher was the only person to speak at either service because, Graham said, 'we didn't have any audience participation, I'm not keen on that'. Graham did not want to put either of his children through the ordeal of speaking at their mother's funeral. 'Jeremy...isn't very good at putting himself forward, and I wouldn't have wanted to inflict it on him...that's not his metier at all,' said Graham, while 'Caroline would have done it splendidly, but I didn't really feel it was fair on her'.

**7.4** The thanksgiving service was attended by people representing the different aspects of Janet's life, notably her family, her work and her interests, so that, Graham said, 'the church was full to overflowing'. Graham requested that instead of flowers, donations should be made to a charitable trust set up when Janet's father died, and 'we were able to raise over a thousand quid'. After the service of thanksgiving for Janet's life there was a wake held in a hotel in the centre of Edinburgh to which 'my mother-in-law, she used to go every Sunday for lunch...and we had kept up that tradition, so that's where her wake was'. Graham arranged a bus to take people there, because parking in the city centre was so difficult.

**7.5** Graham had known that Janet favoured cremation, but apart from that they had not discussed her preferences for her funeral. He said, 'I don't think she actually deliberately spoke about it, but I knew what her favourite hymns are. Yes, we talked about it without talking about it, if you know what I mean'. With regard to his own future funeral Graham said, 'I'm very ambivalent, thinking about myself now, but I've thought about it and I can't make up my mind...of course it's not something I talk over very easily with (my son)'.

**7.6** The process by which Graham made decisions about Janet's funeral and thanksgiving service may be described as a blend of situations in which he behaved like a reflexive individual and occasions when he followed traditional authorities. He shopped around to find an appropriate individual to conduct the funeral, and in order to do this he had to reflect upon his wife's beliefs and emotions and reflexively select a representative of an expert system to take charge of the funeral service. The expert system of which he made use, however, was the traditional authority of the Christian church, of which both Graham and Janet were adherents. During both the funeral service and the service of thanksgiving the lay preacher was the only person to speak, in the manner of Edinburgh funerals that took place before the 1990s, as remarked by the Church of Scotland minister quoted above. However, using the crematorium solely for a private funeral is an unusual thing to do, particularly when this was carried out immediately before the service of thanksgiving which was attended by many mourners. Making that choice depended upon Graham reflecting on his own previous experience of attending funerals and deciding that this would be what he termed a 'tidier way of doing it'.

**7.7** Janet's service of thanksgiving was personalised to her in the sense that there was a eulogy given to her and the hymns that were sung were her favourites. For an Edinburgh funeral this is expected practice, and those conducting funerals routinely ask about the life of the person who died so that they can write a tribute, while funeral directors habitually ask bereaved families about musical choices (Howarth 1996). Graham made use of the traditional authority of the church, but he chose the church and lay preacher in a reflexive fashion more redolent of late modernity (Giddens 1991). The funeral tea was held in the hotel to which Janet's family had traditionally gone for Sunday lunch, the florist he chose was a friend who always provided the family's flowers, and cremation was usual practice in Janet's family. Graham thus honoured the traditions of the family into which he had married, tacitly acknowledging the continuing influence of the family as an institution (Gilding 2010).



## Discussion

**8.1** Aspects of late modernity can be manifest, even in a setting and during an event regarded as traditional, such as a funeral on the Isle of Lewis. It is also possible for an individual to make use of the traditional authority of the church and for this to come about in a reflexively modern manner. The two funerals discussed in this paper vary in this respect. The funeral organised by Robert on the Isle of Lewis for his wife was reflexively driven by Robert's discussion with Lucy before she died, and his perceptions and ideas about her life and death. He made use of the expert systems that were available to him to organise what seemed to him to be a suitable funeral for his wife.

**8.2** Graham, on the other hand, arranged a funeral that was more in tune with traditional Christian ways, despite the manner in which he chose the church and the lay preacher to conduct the funeral and the thanksgiving service. The process of selection he used was a reflexive one in which he took into account his wife's beliefs, as well as his own ideas, in order to make an appropriate decision. The service of thanksgiving for Janet and the funeral service were both conducted in accordance with traditional Christian ways of funeral worship, and included hymns, prayers, and Bible readings. The lay preacher was the only person to speak, and he represented the traditional authority of the church. That Graham was behaving reflexively in his decision making did not alter the fact that the lay preacher was invited to conduct the funeral because he was a representative of a traditional Christian church, and that he behaved as such in his conduct of the funeral.

**8.3** The actions of Graham, in particular, suggest that individuals have the capacity to choose which aspects of traditional practice they wish to use and can interweave them with non-traditional ways. Institutions such as the family and church continue to influence people's lives, despite the prevalence of reflexivity (Gilding 2010). This suggests that there is more to the way in which individuals deal with death than a simple reaction to a fateful moment (Giddens 1991) or marginal situation (Berger 1967), which causes the individual to revert to traditional practices when confronted with a situation beyond the limits of their reflexivity. Graham used the traditional institution of the church and its practices, but he chose to do so and he combined this with other less traditional practices.

**8.4** Both the funerals described in this paper are recognisable as funerals and the individuals involved in their organisation are subject to social forces outside themselves, even when acting reflexively. As Adams (2003) suggests, reflexivity is socially specific and embedded in a particular social setting. Robert made his choices despite his awareness that he might offend locals, but his concern to honour his wife's wishes and character outweighed this anxiety; for his own funeral he said that he will be happy with the local customs.

**8.5** The experiences of Robert and Graham described here suggest that individuals can be both self-reflexive and non-reflexive by turns. The reflexivity exhibited by the two widowers was to be found within their relationships, particularly in the relationship each man had with his deceased wife. Reflexivity was also to be found in the processes involved in planning the funerals, such as when Robert consulted the island funeral director about the possibility of arranging a cremation for Lucy.

**8.6** However, it was also the case that traditional institutions such as the church and family maintained an important presence. Both men included their adult children in the funeral planning process, and the institutional church was particularly important for the funeral planned by Graham. Acting as a reflexive individual of late modernity is therefore not necessarily something that an individual either does or does not do, it can be something that an individual sometimes does and sometimes does not do.

**8.7** The choices which both men made were influenced by their specific circumstances and the settings in which they lived (Adams, 2003). While he lived in a traditional social setting Robert's status as an outsider made his non-traditional choices easier both for him to make and for his friends and neighbours to accept in a way they might not have done had he been a native. For Graham living in a city which lacked identifiable local traditions meant that the options were wide open for him, and included recourse to traditional authorities. In a manner consistent with Walter's concept of the revival of death, aspects of tradition, modernity and neo-modernity were combined in these funerals (Walter, 1994). Reflexivity in the context of death and funerals is thus not an all or nothing matter, it is subject to context and individuals both engage in it and fail to engage in it (Adams, 2003).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, <<http://next.oregonianextra.com/lovelle/>>, a site which details the end of life decisions made by Lovelle Svart.

<sup>2</sup>The 2010 funeral of aid worker Linda Norgrove was held on the Isle of Lewis where her family live. The BBC filmed part of the funeral procession and this is available on their website at <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-11621902>>.

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